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Popular Culture Co-productions and Collaborations in East and Southeast Asia

NISSIM OTMAZGIN and EYAL BEN-ARI

Singapore and Kyoto: NUS Press in association with Kyoto University Press, 2013, x+276p.

The recent growth of Asian media markets coincides with the emergence of an academic area which can be labelled as (inter-)Asian media and cultural studies. English-language academic publications such as *Trajectories: Inter-Asian Cultural Studies* (Chen 1998) and *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Iwabuchi 2002) may be given credit for launching this new academic field. Its further development was subsequently enabled by the publication of a string of academic volumes, including *Rogue Flows: Trans-Asian Cultural Traffic* (Iwabuchi *et al.* 2004), *Asian Media Studies* (Erni and Chua 2005), and *East Asian Pop Culture: Analyzing the Korean Wave* (Chua and Iwabuchi 2008), among many others.

The publication of *Popular Culture Co-productions and Collaborations in East and Southeast Asia* constitutes an interesting contribution to this rapidly emerging field. In particular, this new edited volume distinguishes itself from previous titles in its focus on cultural production. While other volumes predominantly focus on the international consumption and reception of media and cultural texts across Asian countries, this volume casts light on international dimensions of production. In this way, it extends the primary thesis of the field—namely, the interconnectedness of media and cultural experiences in Asian societies—to the realm of production, which is entwined with processes of transnational creation and construction, not only of cultural products but also of social values.

Yoshiko Nakano's chapter in this volume is emblematic of such a perspective. It draws upon historical examples which reveal the contributions made by other Asian personnel (Hong Kong and Thai) to the localization (further development) of Japanese rice cookers—often recognized as a quintessential made-in-Japan electric product in Asia. Shin Hyunjoon's chapter elaborates how K-pop has been developed in line with different agents' contingent strategies designed to infiltrate into different Asian markets. As a result, according to Shin, the "K-" in K-pop "has become more

than the abbreviation of ‘Korean’” (p. 146) and the phenomenon indicates a “trans-Asian version of pop cosmopolitanism” (p. 147). Doobo Shim’s chapter similarly associates the recent development of the Korean film industry with the changing environment of Asian media industries and international cultural flows in the region.

The extension in scope of the regional approach is also one of the book’s strengths. In common with other volumes, it includes chapters which highlight the roles of Japan, South Korea, and Hong Kong as main cultural producers in the Asian region. However, such an emphasis is complemented by chapters covering cultural production (in connection with the outer world) in the Philippines, Indonesia, and China. Rolando B. Tolentino’s chapter presents a historical overview of the international export and the co-production of Philippine media texts. Abidin Kusno’s chapter highlights the appropriation of cultural forms and genres—Hong Kong comics and kung fu novels—in the articulation and assertion of Chinese ethnicity in Indonesia under the repressive Suharto regime.

The volume does not avoid confronting colonial histories and the Cold War era which shaped the process of regional formation of Asia. In his chapter, Nissim Otmazgin underlines the middle class-centered “economic and consumerist” characteristic of regionalization in Asia, in contrast with “the slow progress in the formation of regional political institutions” (pp. 33–34). This insight helps explain why much Asian media and cultural studies research focuses in a limited fashion on the growing volume of contemporary transnational consumption, often bracketing, or otherwise downplaying, historical and political issues in the process. Caroline S. Hau and Takashi Shiraishi’s chapter on Hong Kong cinema’s international collaborations clearly maps out the political configuration of the region, which was set out during the Cold War period, while elaborating on Hong Kong cinema’s various Asian ventures at different times. Leung Yuk Ming (Lisa)’s chapter can be aligned with this work in that it also delves into the critical (and political) issues and practical strategies of the “global” Hong Kong film industry, this time vis-à-vis its lucrative but also precarious China venture: in other words, Hong Kong-China film co-production. Rob Efrid’s chapter on a documentary, Li Ying’s *Yasukuni* (2007), registers not only the ongoing legacies of imperial and colonial history in Asian societies, but also the changes that were brought into those societies—in particular, Japan—by the presence of other Asians. The chapter casts light on some of the positive changes, which may occur within Asian societies with the growing volume of human and cultural traffic in the region.

Last but not least, another virtue of the volume lies in the way in which it deploys the frameworks of co-production and collaboration. Although these frameworks may require further refinement (i.e. how to define collaboration and how to delineate popular culture co-production), this approach encompasses a variety of productive conceptualizations which induce creative and critical thinking. For example, the notion of “niche globality,” advanced by Tolentino, recognizes subtle differences among the particularities of transnational engagements of Philippine media texts:

“Other than the enclaves of the nation’s 10 million migrant workers all over the world, the export of Philippine media texts has produced transnational pocket markets—a niche globality in which specific media texts engage with unintended audiences” (p. 152). Kelly Hu’s chapter on Chinese fan subtitling of Japanese and American TV drama series explicates how those fan-subtitlers function as cultural intermediaries linking China with other (Asian) countries and analyzes their affective labor in terms of neoliberal capitalistic work ethics. Hu highlights that, by collaborating with one another to produce subtitles for other Chinese consumers, these fans also “co-produce” global media culture.

In sum, *Popular Culture Co-productions and Collaborations in East and Southeast Asia* is another valuable entry to the currently burgeoning academic field of Asian media and cultural studies. It engages with a number of important historical and cultural subjects by presenting new conceptual methods for understanding processes of international cultural production in the region.

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Organising under the Revolution: Unions and the State in Java, 1945–48

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Visitors to Lawang Sewu might be confused as to the building’s significance. Situated in the heart of Semarang on the north coast of Central Java, the building is Indonesia’s most famous haunted house; hence the crowds of domestic tourists. In addition to ghosts, the massive colonial era building is also home to conflicting and competing historical narratives. Once the center of the Dutch East Indies Railway Company, Lawang Sewu was an important site in the history of imperialism and the struggle for independence. Today, as in most of post-colonial Indonesia, the public history